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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON AUDITOR-GENERAL CONTROVERSY

REF: BANGKOK 5917

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The embattled Senate President announced on Friday, September 23rd that the nominee for the position of Auditor-General, Mr. Wisut Montriwat, had withdrawn his nomination for the position. The King, who stood silent rather than endorse the nomination, accepted the withdrawal. This breaks the stalemate that has existed between a small group of Senators perceived as loyal to the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) and supporters of the current Auditor-General, Khunying Jarawan Maintaka. It is unlikely that the fight will end anytime soon. END SUMMARY.

ONE STALEMATE IS BROKEN . . .

12. (SBU) The Senate's unexpected nomination of a new Auditor-General became a lightning rod of controversy for the Thai Rak Thai, and most notably for Senate Speaker Suchon Chaleekrua (reftel). The Thai public has shown an unusual amount of anger towards the Senate because the move to replace the current Auditor-General without the King's endorsement has been seen as a challenge to the King's authority. Although the King saves his direct involvement in political affairs for the most serious of issues, his silence on a proposal or a nominee almost always indicates his disapproval, and that he wants the parties to resolve it on their own. As more time continued to pass after this nomination was submitted to the King, the more it came to be seen as challenging the King to do something*not something customarily done in Thailand. By withdrawing the nomination, any perceived pressure for the King to make a statement on the matter*and thus any offense against the King*has ended. The King accepted the withdrawal for consideration to the post, but did not say anything more about the fate of the current Auditor-General, Jarawan.

. . . WHILE ANOTHER LOOMS LARGE

13. (SBU) The withdrawal breaks the stalemate but does not solve the ultimate problem: who is the rightful Auditor-General of Thailand? Under the law, the ball is back in the hands of the Auditor-Committee of the Senate. Each of the many options has a drawback. It might be easiest to allow the current Auditor-General to serve until the end of her term, but that does not solve the constitutional question (her appointment may have been improperly done) or the political question (she is perceived as a scrupulous official who may embarrass Thai Rak Thai by uncovering and publicizing corruption.) Any option that involves sending a new name to the King risks the repeating the cycle just completed) a nomination met by a stony and accusatory silence.

WHAT'S NEXT?

14. (SBU) The Auditor-General committee announced on Tuesday, September 27th, that they will take 10 days to study the situation more thoroughly before announcing what action they will take. This announcement comes as an unexpected change that reflects growing rifts between members of the committee. Prior to this issue turning into a controversy, the members were all firmly united in their demand that Jarawan had to step down. However, the committee has taken special note of the public outrage over the attempt to replace Jarawan, as she is seen as someone whose untimely replacement was caused by her doing her job a little too well. In the interim, the Senate has announced that they will meet on Monday, October 3rd to discuss the issue. For now, Jarawan is still the Auditor-General but remains on the sidelines, and there are continued calls for Senate Speaker Suchon to resign for mishandling the issue from the beginning.

15. (SBU) Comment. The crisis has subsided for now, but it is not resolved. Although the controversy slightly embarrassed the TRT, the party has also benefited--Jarawan remains, for now, effectively sidelined from doing her job. No matter what the Auditor-General Committee decides, it will be some time before a fully-functioning Auditor-General is in operation, allowing Thailand's many issues involving corruption to remain unaddressed. End Comment.

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